

Commencement Address
The Ohio State University
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Ohio Board of Regents

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

On behalf of the Ohio Board of Regents and myself, I want to offer congratulations on the occasion of your graduation. Each academic degree is a symbol of accomplishment by many people. Rare indeed is the degree of which only the recipient is proud. As parents, or faculty, as family or friends, we join those of you who are graduating in the pride of accomplishment - or the breath of relief that survival has paid off thus.

But the focus on you who are graduating is more than appropriate today. Others surely helped, as they must in all important endeavors; but you did the work, and you rightfully hold the award. We are here to pay you honor and we do. Congratulations.

Many times in our activities we are so deeply committed to a special task that we identify the whole of higher education with what we do or with the college which is our alma mater. The Ohio State University is a great institution. I hope that you and the school have a mutual admiration which will provide sustenance all your lifetime. Perhaps I should warn you that at a meeting yesterday a discussion was held about how to turn some of your affection into alumni gifts. But giving is always part of a love affair.

This morning, however, I want to focus on the system of higher education of which the Ohio State University is a major part. You are familiar with the concept of "system" in this context. In Ohio almost 390,000 students are provided with education services of many diverse types in over 120 educational institutions, two-year, four-year, and major university, public and private. These institutions have certain relationships among themselves, for example, the

public schools are a tighter knit "subsystem," and others with different types of institutions "outside" the system.

It is my thesis that the "system" of higher education in Ohio is working through problems facing higher education toward a greater sense of community, a development that promises a new strength more adequate to meet the challenges we face. I want to describe some of the movement toward that greater sense of community and to enlist your help.

Almost any discussion of higher education today begins with an important fact of our life. The number of persons ages 18 to 21 knocking on the doors of higher education has stopped growing. This is common knowledge today, but it gave us quite a shock two years ago.

We attribute it to many things. The free life style that became part of the American scene in the 1960's seems to encourage some persons to value college less than they once did. The pressure of the military draft for a war in Viet Nam that could be postponed by college has been removed. A disenchantment seems to have set in among some groups who looked upon a college degree as an automatic guarantee against employment problems.

Whether these are all the explanations - or none of them - persons in higher education were motivated to take a good look at the market for our product. The population projections make it quite clear that even without the problems of the changed behavior of the potential clientele, after 1981 there is going to be an absolute numerical drop in the number of persons of traditional college age which will run at least through 1992. The market seemed to have reached steady state, with prospects only for decline.

This is very unlikely. Disillusionment about the value of a college education runs counter to the historical view of the American public which continually puts more faith in higher education. It also is contrary to the overwhelming majority opinion of the total adult population every time we measure it. We can be reasonably confident that this factor will change.

More important has been the response of the community of higher education as a whole. For many years we had known how important mid-career education and educational updating were. Here is a virtually untapped market that is now being opened. Also more persons were recruited to short term education more directly aimed at a career - especially technical and occupational education. Community colleges and technical colleges in Ohio, as across the country, are expanding - and probably bringing persons into higher education who would have been lost to the market without their special appeal.

Some educational competitors and some newspaper writers have attempted to make the attractiveness of technical colleges antagonistic to the senior institutions. But as Ohio State's Dean Shumaker pointed out in a letter to the editor this past Tuesday, such an antagonism is based on misunderstanding or harmful carelessness. Real opportunity is at hand if we choose to work together.

Some of the persons who go to the two-year colleges want to go directly to a senior school to work on a baccalaureate degree. This is simple enough for those who take regular college parallel courses, but on occasion there have been problems for the person who took a technical course. One of the good results of the shortage of college age students, however, is that some of the senior colleges are

trying to recruit two-year graduates to go on to school. We are looking forward to seeing a four-year college taking the initiative in working out articulation processes as part of its own recruitment program, rather than maintaining a posture of resisting the entrance of a person with a different academic base. It will surely come as the sense of community grows in higher education.

Let us turn now to the problem areas that have usually been associated with inter-institutional competition. I don't want to imply that all the results of inter-institutional competition are bad. Expending extra energy to improve quality and to expand the market probably helps higher education and society. Competition doesn't seem to be decreasing either. But there are some contrary examples of inter-institutional cooperation that are very encouraging.

One is the development of consortium efforts among colleges and universities. Probably the most broadly based consortium in Ohio is the Miami Valley Consortium of public and private schools, which allows inter-campus course registration with no additional charges for the students. One of the strongest groups is the triumverate of Bowling Green, University of Toledo, and the Medical College of Ohio in Toledo, which has developed joint programs and sharing of facilities. The Cleveland Commission of Higher Education, the oldest of the consortia-like organizations, has taken on new life in the past two years. The newest consortium brings schools together in Cincinnati and northern Kentucky.

We are working now, primarily through the Graduate Deans Advisory Committee, on evaluating and strengthening graduate education on a sub-state

regional basis. Most persons agree, in the abstract, that we over-developed our graduate offerings in the 1960's. Now we are trying to pull together strengths of the various schools to develop the level of quality that everyone will recognize. A step in this direction is a new doctoral program in sociology offered jointly by Akron University and Kent State. Comparable also is the new Northeastern Ohio Universities Medical College which combines governance of Kent, Akron, and Youngstown Universities.

This coming year we hope we will be able to strengthen many of these efforts by contracts between public and private colleges under legislative appropriations provided last year.

I ought to speak specifically about the relationship between the public and private sectors of higher education. Here in Ohio in the period of rapid growth for higher education - particularly the 1960's - we put a lot of special effort into expanding public colleges. It worked out well; we created public opportunities for everyone who sought them, and private colleges generally focused on upgrading their facilities and services for a very select group of students.

Then came the drop in the market, the very bitter crunch of inflation, a lot of second guessing, and some too hastily constructed ramparts. There were suggestions of unmonitored state support for private schools, higher tuition at state schools to lower competition, charges of gross inefficiencies going both ways, and the like. The Inter-University Council of public colleges expressed its high indignation at what it perceived as my consultation with private schools to the detriment of the development of public universities.

The clash certainly has not ended, but I think it has begun to abate.

It has been recognized that state support cannot go without accountability, and that at some point a private school can cease to be private, as our neighbors in Pennsylvania can testify. There has been a recognition that higher tuitions in public colleges would result primarily in a contraction of the clientele for higher education, more than in a redistribution between public and private. There is gradually coming a recognition that service to students is more important than whether a public or private institution holds the resources.

This year many private colleges have begun to work out the problems in using the Uniform Information System that public universities use; we will begin to get data by which all schools can compare their operations. The Graduate Deans of our public colleges have invited graduate deans of private universities to meet with them. An advisory committee of private college presidents has begun to meet quarterly with the Chancellor; the public college presidents meet monthly.

Most important, there seems to be a real prospect that both public and private university and college presidents will agree on the report of the Task Force on Higher Education when it appears on May 1.

We should all feel a sense of satisfaction as we begin to get beyond pitched confrontation to a sense of mutual worth and support.

The third problem area in which a sense of community is important is finance. Inflation is not peculiar to higher education, but as is true in most of the service industries, inflation hits us very hard. In the past few years, too, some other governmental activities, not as well advanced as higher education,

have had a deserved attention. But the time has come when higher education should move back to the fore. We must work for substantially greater financial support.

We, at the Board of Regents, are looking as carefully as possible at what can be done to get the most out of every tax dollar spent. The university and college presidents are working with us in examining carefully the questions involved in productivity in a quality system.

It is important that as many persons as possible, across the state, understand how we are working together to provide quality educational opportunities of all types, how committed we are to using resources fully and wisely, and what resources are required to achieve the goals of higher education which the whole state shares.

With a sense of community based on understanding and common conviction we will be strong in developing support for the financing which we need.

You here today, graduates and friends, are part of the community on which we must build. Ohio has a rich diversity in higher education. If we can pull together its strengths, all our citizens will be well served. If we do not develop a community of mutual support, no institution will reach its potential.

Optimism should be the order of the day as well as celebration - optimism we can base on a greater sense of community.